

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 01546

E.O. LL652: XGDS
TAGS: ENRG, UK
SUBJECT: BRITISH TELEVISION PROGRAM SUGGESTS OIL
COMPANIES SHOULD BE NATIONALIZED

L. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. IN A PRIME-TIME PROGRAM ON
BRITISH COMMERCIAL TELEVISION JANUARY 23, THE CONTRO-
VERSIAL PROFESSOR PETER ODELL SUGGESTED THAT BRITAIN
SHOULD FOLLOW OPEC'S EXAMPLE AND NATIONALIZE THE INTER-
NATIONAL OIL COMPANIES. WHILE THE PROGRAM WAS TITLED
"PERSONAL REPORT" BY ODELL, IT STATED THAT HE WAS A
CONSULTANT TO THE U.K. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY. IT
INCLUDED VARIOUS SHORT CLIPS OF ENERGY SECRETARY BENN,
CONSERVATIVE ENERGY SPOKESMAN KING, AND OTHERS EXPRESSIN
CONVENTIONAL VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT-COMPANY RELATIONS, THEN
LED TO ODELL'S CONCLUSION THAT NATIONALIZATION IS IN
ORDER. THE IMPRESSION TO A CASUAL VIEWER COULD BE THAT
THE POSSIBILITY OF NATIONALIZATION OF OIL COMPANIES WAS
BEING SERIOUSLY DISCUSSED.

2. THE PROGRAM, ENTITLED "SEVEN SISTERS AND THE BLUE-EYE
ARABS", SHOWED OPEC MINISTERS IN THE PROCESS OF
NATIONALIZING OIL COMPANIES AND CONCLUDED WITH ODELL'S
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SUGGESTION THAT THE BRITISH SHOULD LEARN FROM OPEC AND
BECOME "BLUE-EYED ARABS". NO ASPECT OF OPEC ACTIVITIES
OTHER THAN NATIONALIZATION WAS PRESENTED ANYWHERE IN THE
PROGRAM. ODELL ADDED AT THE END THAT WHILE ALL SEVEN OF
THE MAJOR INTERNATIONAL OIL COMPANIES HAD BEEN INVITED
TO PRESENT THEIR VIEWS ON THE PROGRAM, NONE HAD ACCEPTED.
THIS, HE SAID, SHOWED THAT THEY WERE IN COLLUSION AND

THEREFORE COULD BE SUSPECTED OF CONSPIRING IN ALL OF THEIR ACTIVITIES. HE ADDED THAT "EVEN BRITISH PETROLEUM, WITH 51 PERCENT GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP" DECLINED TO APPEAR. END UNCLASSIFIED.

3. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL. TOO MUCH SHOULD NOT BE MADE OF SUCH A PROGRAM BEYOND RECOGNIZING THAT THE PRIME-TIME PRESENTATION (8:30 P.M.) AND HIGHLY SELECTIVE EDITING COULD LEAD TO A MISREADING BY THE BRITISH GENERAL PUBLIC. ODELL IS RECOGNIZED BY THOSE KNOWLEDGEABLE IN OIL TO BE A CONTROVERSIAL PERSONALITY. TOO, HIS SUGGESTION OF THE NEED FOR NATIONALIZATION, STRONG THOUGH IT WAS, WAS INDIRECT, AS NOTED ABOVE. HOWEVER, HIS STATUS AS AN ADVISER TO THE U.K. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY ADDED AN UNFORTUNATE AIR OF LEGITIMACY TO HIS "PERSONAL REPORT".

4. THE HEAD OF THE OIL POLICY DIVISION IN THE ENERGY DEPARTMENT DOWNPLAYS ODELL'S CONNECTION WITH THAT DEPARTMENT. HE TOLD US ODELL IS NOT "ADVISER-AT-LARGE" (AS THE PROGRAM SEEMED TO SUGGEST) AND HAS MERELY BEEN COMMISSIONED TO DO A STUDY ON GOVERNMENT-COMPANY RELATIONS WORLD-WIDE. THE OCTOBER 5, 1977 PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS APPOINTMENT LISTS ODELL AS "A PART-TIME CONSULTANT WHO HAS BEEN "ASKED TO REVIEW THE REGULATION OF OIL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE U.K. CONTINENTAL SHELF" AND TO "REPORT ON THE EVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT/OIL INDUSTRY
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RELATIONS IN COUNTRIES WHICH HE PLANS TO VISIT."

5. THE NON-APPEARANCE OF OIL COMPANIES ON ANY PROGRAM EDITED BY ODELL SEEMS NORMAL. WE HAVE TALKED TO SEVERAL COMPANIES, EACH OF WHICH VEHEMENTLY DENIES ODELL'S CHARGE THAT THEY HAD SOMEHOW COORDINATED THEIR NON-APPEARANCE. THEY SAID THE INDIVIDUAL, AND NOT THE SUBJECT INVOLVED, HAD CAUSED THEM TO DECLINE THE INVITATION. AT LEAST ONE COMPANY HAD OFFERED TO APPEAR UNTIL THEY LEARNED THE PROGRAM WOULD BE PRE-RECORDED AND EDITED BY ODELL. AND AT LEAST ONE COMPANY HAS ALREADY WRITTEN THE MANAGER OF THE COMMERCIAL TELEVISION STATION TO COMPLAIN OF WHAT THEY FEEL WAS THE SELECTIVE AND MISLEADING MANNER IN WHICH THE PROGRAM WAS PRESENTED.

BREWSTER

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